

UJIA Department of Informal Education

A healthy mind and a healthy body

Written by Shelley Marsh

‘Maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of God.

One cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator if one is ill.’

Moses Maimonides



To be an Olympic athlete, one needs to be at one's peak in terms of physical and mental agility. A key Jewish commentator on all matters to do with health was Moses Maimonides (1138 – 1204). Maimonides (also known as the Rambam) was a prominent medieval Jewish physician born in Spain and raised in Morocco. Maimonides was the court physician to the Regent of Egypt. He incorporated the teachings of Hippocrates, Galen and Muslim physicians into his works.

Not only was Maimonides a highly skilled doctor, he was also a rabbi, renowned as a scholar in religion and philosophy. He wrote major commentaries on the Torah, including *Commentary on the Mishnah* and *Mishneh Torah* and the philosophical treatise *Guide for the Perplexed*.

UJIA, 37 Kentish Town Road, London NW1 8NX
Tel: 020 7424 6400 Fax: 020 7424 6401 central@ujia.org www.ujia.org

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Maimonides believed in a "healthy mind in a healthy body" which he taught meant that physical well-being and mental health are connected. Both physical and mental health must be viewed holistically if one is to be well.

In *Medical Aphorisms*, Maimonides described symptoms, diagnosis, pathology and treatment of many diseases, including stroke, diabetes, liver inflammation, pneumonia and asthma. He believed in treating disease by removing the underlying causes. He advocated disease prevention with hygiene, fresh air, clean water, exercise and healthy diet. He also wrote the Glossary of Drug Names, an extensive compilation of medicinal treatments of the day. Given the time frame that Maimonides lived, worked and wrote, his analyses and understanding is quite remarkable.



Read through a translation of some of the key points written by Maimonides. See peulah suggestions below

Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides Translation of laws of moral disposition CHAPTER FOUR

1. When the body is healthy and sound, one treads in the ways of the Lord, it being impossible to understand or know anything of the knowledge of the Creator when one is sick. It is obligatory for people to avoid things which are not good for one's body.

2. A person should never eat except when he/she is hungry nor drink unless he/she is thirsty.

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3. A person should not eat until his stomach is completely full but should eat until the person is approximately one-fourth to the point of satiation.

4. When a person eats, he should always be sitting in his place or reclining on the left side.



5. A person should not walk or ride or exercise or agitate his/her body, until the food is digested in his/her intestines. Any one who exercises immediately after a meal or who tires themselves out brings serious and grave illnesses upon him/herself.

6. The day and night consist of twenty-four hours. It is sufficient for a person to sleep one-third thereof, which is eight hours. These should be at the end of the night, so that from the beginning of sleep until the rising of the sun will be eight hours.



7. A person should not sleep on his face or on his back but on his side; at the beginning of the night, on the left side, and at the end of the night on the right side. Further, a person should not go to sleep shortly after eating but should wait approximately three or four hours after a meal. One should not sleep during the day.

8. In the warm (summer) months, one should eat cooling foods, not use seasoning to excess, and consume vinegar. (75) In the rainy (winter) months, one should eat warming foods, (76) abundantly spice the food, and eat a little mustard (77). In this manner one should prepare food in cold climates and warm climates, in each and every place that which is best suited thereto.



9. Another major principle of bodily health, is that as long as a person labours and becomes greatly fatigued and does not overly indulge oneself, no illness will befall that person and his/her strength becomes fortified even if she/he eats detrimental foods.

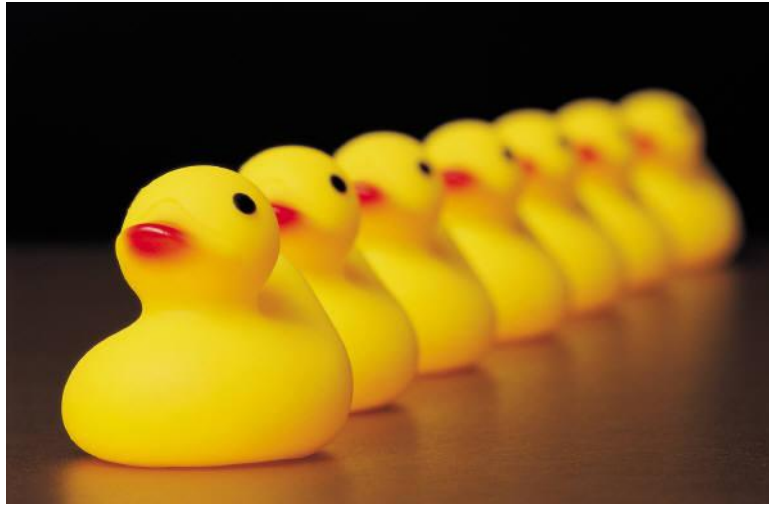
10. Anyone who lives a sedentary life and does not exercise even if he/she eats good foods and takes care of him/herself according to proper medical care – all his/her days will be painful ones and his/her strength will wane.



11. Excessive eating is like a deadly poison to the body of any person, and it is a principal cause of all illnesses. Most diseases that people are afflicted with are due to bad foods or because he/she fills his abdomen and eats excessively, even of good (i.e. wholesome) foods. This is what Solomon in his wisdom stated: Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from trouble (Prov. 21:23); that is to say, he who guards his mouth from consuming detrimental food or satiation, and his tongue from speaking except where necessary (will remain healthy).



12 The correct manner of bathing is for a person to enter the bathhouse and bathe every seven days. One should not enter the bath immediately after eating nor when one is hungry but when the food begins to be digested. He should wash his entire body with hot water that does not scald the body, and the head alone may be washed with water hot enough to scald the body. Then he should wash his body with lukewarm water, and then with tepid water, and so on until he washes with cold water. (93) Over his head he should not pour either lukewarm or cold water. In the rainy season, one should not bathe in cold water. One should not bathe until one perspires and one's entire body becomes supple, nor should one remain too long in the bath: rather, as soon as one perspires and the body becomes supple, one should rinse the body and leave the bath.



Suggested peulah 1

Discussion

Explain who Maimonides was and contextualize his teachings. Show the group the teachings above. Divide into small groups and discuss one or two points each. You might want to use the guiding questions to facilitate those small group discussions

Guiding Questions

- Do you perceive that in our modern society any of these teachings are still relevant?
- Which of the points do you disagree with?
- Which of the points have formed the basis of modern medicine today?

Suggested peulah 2

Maimonides or Bluff?

Set up a role play where people play at being patients/doctors. Give each patient a problem they would like to discuss with the doctor. The doctor needs to respond, giving the teaching of Maimonides or another solution to the problem the patient has brought to them. See 'roles and responses' role play below.

Following on from the advice given by each doctor, the group needs to decide which was the advice Maimonides had written, and which was a bluff...

Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides

Translation of laws of moral disposition – chapter four

Surgery One

Patient

Hello Doc

I don't feel well. I eat and eat and drink a lot but I don't feel well. What's your advice?

Doctor M

A person should never eat except when he/she is hungry nor drink unless he/she is thirsty.

Doctor Bluff

You must always eat 3 meals a day, and snack in between, even if you're not hungry. That will keep your strength up!

Surgery Two

Patient

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I am really busy and my friends keep telling me I have to sit down and eat. But I don't have the time. Is that a problem, doc?

Doctor M

When a person eats, they should be sitting down or reclining to their left side.

Doctor Bluff

Don't waste time! Keep on moving and you will be fine. Fast food is great – keep it fast!

Surgery Three

Patient

I am in the middle of exams, doc and need to keep studying day and night. How much sleep do I really need to feel well?

Doctor M

The day and night consist of twenty-four hours. It is sufficient for a person to sleep one-third thereof, which is eight hours. These should be at the end of the night, so that from the beginning of sleep until the rising of the sun will be eight hours. So, eight hours is best!

Doctor Bluff

If you have a lot to do, try and sleep for an hour or two and then go back to the books. Everyone can cope with a short burst of energy so eat something that will give you a sugar rush and you will be fine. Medical school wasn't easy, you know!

Surgery Four

Patient

I am not sleeping well, Doctor. Any good advice you can give me?

Doctor M

A person should not sleep on his face or on his back but on his side; at the beginning of the night, on the left side, and at the end of the night on the right side. Further, a person should not go to sleep shortly after eating but should wait approximately three or four hours after a meal. One should not sleep during the day.

Doctor Bluff

Errrr... Count sheep? Warm milk before bed?

Surgery Five

Patient

Hi Doc. I want to live long and prosper. Any tips?

Doctor M

Anyone who lives a sedentary life and does not exercise even if he/she eats good foods and takes care of him/herself according to proper medical care – all his/her days will be painful ones and his/her strength will wane. Exercise, eat well, sleep for eight hours a night, work hard.

Doctor Bluff

Do the lottery. Win. Have a great life.

Surgery Six

Patient

I really love baths and showers. What is the best way to keep clean and healthy?

Doctor M

The correct manner of bathing is for a person to enter the bathhouse and bathe every seven days. One should not enter the bath immediately after eating nor when one is hungry but when the food begins to be digested. He should wash his entire body with hot water that does not scald the body, and the head alone may be washed with water hot enough to scald the body. Then he should wash his body with lukewarm water, and then with tepid water, and so on until he washes with cold water. (93) Over his head he should not pour either lukewarm or cold water. In the rainy season, one should not bathe in cold water. One should not bathe until one perspires and one's entire body becomes supple, nor should one remain too long in the bath: rather, as soon as one perspires and the body becomes supple, one should rinse the body and leave the bath.

Doctor Bluff

Get up every day and shower for an hour! Make sure there is enough hot water?

Whilst the surgeries might be a fun way to explore the teachings of Maimonides, you might also want to use this activity when you're discussing menus and welfare issues (such as showers whilst at outdoor cap sites) for a residential activities with chanichim.

Maimonides wrote

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When young people are at residential activities it is essential for all madrichim to ensure

Food

Are the chanichim eating nutritious food?

Is the menu well balanced?

Are healthy snacks available?

Can chanichim access drinking water easily?

Sleep

Are chanichim and madrichim getting enough sleep?

Are tzevet meetings ending at a reasonable time?

Is there a set bed time routine ?

Are late night activities calming for chanichim?

Cleanliness

Can chanichim shower/wash every day?

Is the site as clean as it could be?

Has everyone brought tooth brushes, soap etc with them?

Once all chanichim are well fed, well rested and well cared for, then madrichim can educate and chanichim can enjoy the experiences of learning.

Maimonides, as a doctor and a rabbi, taught about the importance of bringing together the physical and the spiritual.

Whilst each chanich/a may not become an Olympic athlete, having a healthy mind and a healthy body will allow each chanich/a in your car to reach their maximum potential.